

THE LIBERTY "76" BOYS OF 76

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

No. 10.

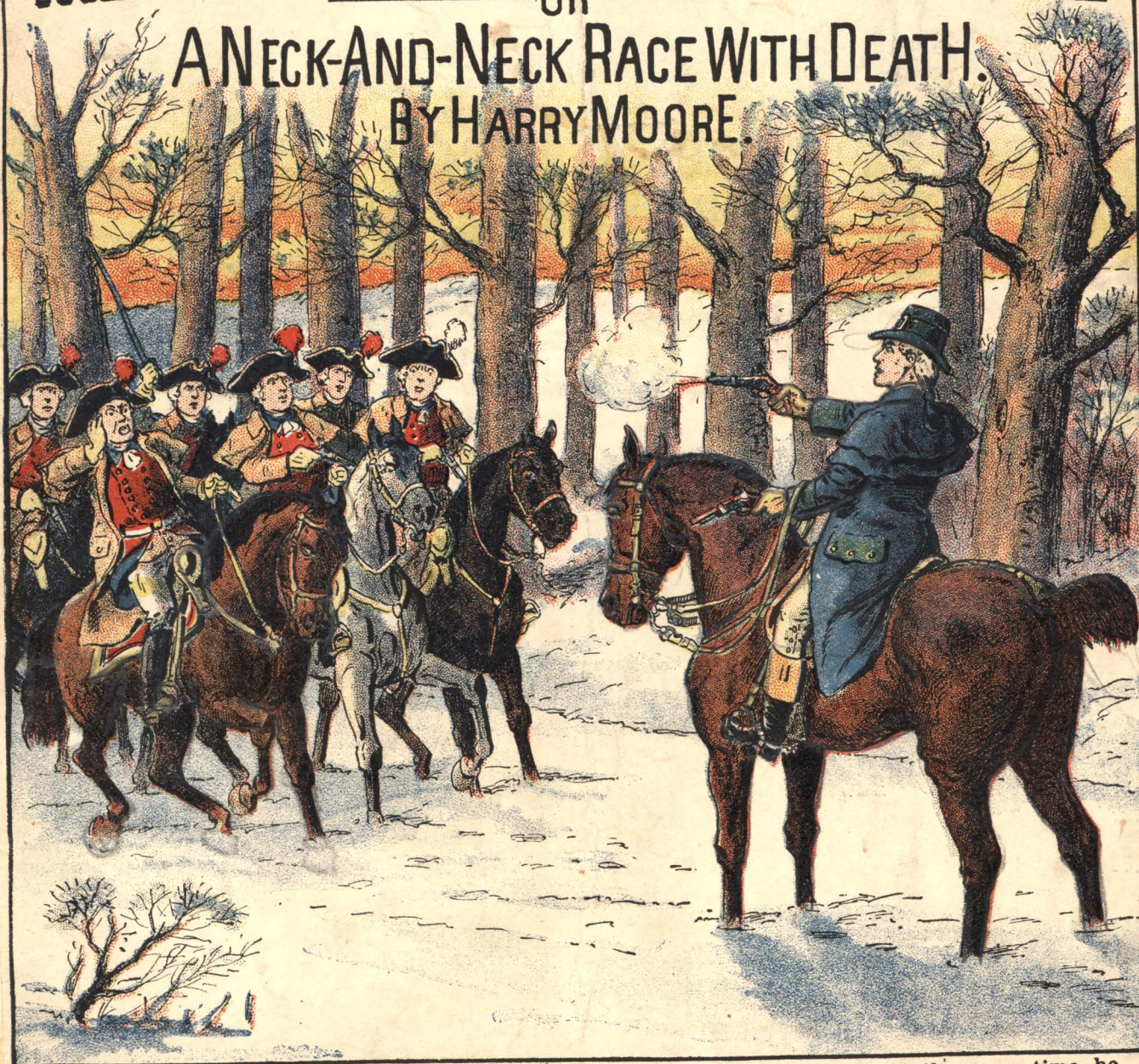
NEW YORK, MARCH 8, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS' NARROW ESCAPE; OR

A NECK-AND-NECK RACE WITH DEATH.

BY HARRY MOORE.



'Now I have you, you cowardly scoundrels! You shall not escape me!' At the same time he fired one pistol, then the other. One of the bullets struck the fellow who had done most of the talking in the tavern, and he gave a yell of pain.

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The Liberty Boys' Narrow Escape

OR,

A NECK-AND-NECK RACE WITH DEATH.

BY HARRY MOORE.

CHAPTER I.

"THE AMERICAN FABIUS."

It was the first week in January, 1777.

General Washington and the patriot army occupied an impregnable position on Morrison Heights, N. J.

The whole country was ringing with the praises of the great general.

Two weeks before, he, with a broken and dispirited army of less than three thousand men, had occupied a position on the west side of the Delaware River, in Pennsylvania, their only safety, seemingly, being the wide river which rolled between them and the British and Hessians, who occupied Trenton and Burlington, in New Jersey.

On Christmas night, however, Washington had crossed the Delaware with twenty-four hundred picked men, had marched nine miles through the snow and sleet, had attacked the Hessians at Trenton, and had captured the entire force of one thousand men.

The British had retreated to Princeton, and had been there joined by Lord Cornwallis, who had been on the point of starting home to England under the impression that the war was over.

Cornwallis with eight thousand men had advanced to Trenton, and Washington had withdrawn his army of less than six thousand men across the Assunpink River, south of Trenton.

Cornwallis had gone to bed that night, saying gleefully to Erskine, his second in command: "We have run the old fox to earth, and will bag him in the morning."

When morning came the "old fox" was not there.

Washington had withdrawn his army, marched around the left flank of the British and moved upon Princeton.

In the early morning he had met two thousand British troops which were on their way to reinforce Cornwallis, and a sharp engagement took place.

It was short as well as sharp.

The British column was cut in two.

Then the redcoats fled, one portion fleeing on toward Trenton, the other retiring in the direction of New Brunswick.

It was a quick and decisive victory for the Americans.

They had killed two hundred of the British and had taken three hundred prisoners.

Their own loss was less than one hundred.

Then the Americans had entered Princeton, captured the small garrison, took the stores, and then had by rapid marches made their way to Morristown Heights, where they had taken up their present impregnable position.

Cornwallis with his army had returned to New Brunswick, and, as the roads were now blocked with snow, he decided to wait till warmer weather before trying to do more.

He was considerably discouraged, anyway, and wanted time to recover from the fit of blues into which the brilliant exploits of Washington had thrown him.

To be thus outwitted and beaten by a man with resources in no way equal to his was very galling to a man of Cornwallis' proud spirit.

Washington was given the name of "The American Fabius" by the people, and the name clung to him all the rest of his life.

As a result of the success which had greeted his efforts the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army was in very good spirits indeed.

He was greatly encouraged, and was disposed to hold the advantage which he had gained by such hard work.

He had practically recovered New Jersey.

The British occupied New Brunswick, Amboy, Paulus Hook and Hackensack, but that was all.

They had been practically hurled back upon New York city.

General Washington and his staff had been holding a council.

When it was ended, the commander-in-chief called an orderly, and told him to bring in a youth named Dick Slater at once.

The orderly saluted and withdrew.

A few minutes later he returned, and, ushering a handsome youth of about eighteen years of age into the room, announced:

"Dick Slater."

General Washington and the other members of the staff greeted Dick pleasantly.

All knew Dick, and knew him well.

Dick was the captain of a company of youths of about his own age.

The company called itself "The Liberty Boys of '76."

The youths were brave, even to rashness.

They were almost invincible in battle.

Hence they had already done great service to the great cause of liberty.

And they were ready and willing to do more.

"Dick," said the commander-in-chief slowly, "two dispatches are to be taken—one to Putnam at Philadelphia, the other to Clinton, at Peekskill. Now you can take your choice of the dispatches, and the other one I wish you to choose a bearer for from among your 'Liberty Boys.' Will you do it?"

"You have but to state your wishes, your excellency," said Dick, quietly; "I will take the dispatch to Clinton, and there is not a single member of my company who would not offer his services if I were to call for a volunteer to take the dispatch."

"Very well, then, select one from among them, and when you are ready, come here and I will hand you the dispatches."

"Very well, your excellency."

Dick saluted and withdrew.

He went at once to the quarters occupied by his company of "Liberty Boys."

"I have work for you, Bob, if you wish to undertake it," he said to Bob Estabrook, a bright, handsome young fellow of his own age.

Bob and he were close friends.

Their homes, near Tarrytown, N. Y., were within a quarter of a mile of each other.

They had played, fished, swam, hunted together; had gone to school together; and they had gone to war together, and had been together ever since.

More, they were in love with each other's sister, Edith Slater and Alice Estabrook.

"If I wish to undertake it, Dick?" remarked Bob, with an air of reproach; "you know, old man, that I am always ready and willing."

"Yes, I think you are, Bob. Then you will attempt this work?"

"Of course; what is it?"

"The commander-in-chief wishes a dispatch taken to General Putnam, at Philadelphia."

"Why don't you want to take it, Dick?" he asked; "you are usually eager to go out and do all the hard work of this kind yourself, and the rest of us only get a chance when there is more work than you can attend to alone."

"And that's the case this time, Bob."

"Um! I thought so! What are you going to do while I am taking this dispatch to Philadelphia?"

"I will be taking one up to Peekskill to Clinton."

"Ah! I see!"

Bob slowly winked his left eye and looked very wise.

"I understand," he went on, drily; "you have chosen the harder job, with your usual generosity—but say, Dick, while you are hugging and kissing Sister Alice for yourself, just kiss Edith a few times for me, won't you? That's a good fellow," and Bob chuckled as he saw Dick flush up.

He would rather Dick should see the folks than that he should do so.

And Bob was as strongly in love with Edith Slater as Dick was with Alice, too.

"I will see the folks if I can do so without losing too much time, Bob," said Dick.

"That's right; if you don't stop going, you can stop coming back, for you won't necessarily have to hurry in returning."

The youths made their arrangements, went out and bridled and saddled their horses, and then went to the headquarters of the commander-in-chief and reported.

"Ah! So you are going to carry one of the dispatches, are you, Master Bob?" remarked General Washington.

"Yes, your excellency," replied Bob; "I am going to Philadelphia. Dick is going to Peekskill—he has a sweet-heart up that way, you know!"

Bob could not resist the temptation to joke Dick.

He was a peculiarly discerning youth, too, was Bob.

He seemed to realize instinctively that the commander-in-chief would enjoy knowing of the affair.

He was not wrong.

General Washington turned toward Dick with a pleasant smile.

There was a twinkle in his usually stern eyes.

"So that is it, Captain Dick?" he remarked; "I did not know it, but I am glad to hear it. You will please present the young lady with my especial compliments and regards, and tell her, Dick, that the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army congratulates her on having so noble and brave a youth for a lover!"

Dick blushed and stammered out the statement that he would do so.

And then he shook his fist at Bob, who was grinning with delight.

"Just wait till I get you by yourself, Bob!" he said, with mock fierceness.

The commander-in-chief laughed.

His recent victories had, as I said in the beginning, put him in a good humor, and he enjoyed this with all the relish that one who has had all such things put aside for a long time could possibly enjoy it.

Then a thought struck Dick.

He would get even with Bob.

By telling on him.

He did so, the commander-in-chief listening with a broadening smile of enjoyment.

"So you are in the same boat with Dick, eh," he remarked, banteringly; "well, it won't hurt either of you, and what I have said to Dick, I say to you."

"Thank you!" said Bob; "don't you think Dick will be in luck to have me for a brother-in-law?"

"Ah! is it your sister he is in love with, Bob?"

"Yes, and my sister that he is in love with!" said Dick.

"Well, well! Now I understand why it is you two are such close friends!" said the commander-in-chief.

Then he brought forth the dispatches, and gave the one for Clinton at Peekskill to Dick, and the one for Putnam at Philadelphia to Bob.

"You will needs be careful, Dick," he said; "There are British troops at Hackensack, so you had better give that point a wide berth. It is to drive the British away from Hackensack that I am sending these orders to Clinton. He will force them to retire, and will then hold the position."

"I will be careful, your excellency," said Dick; "I am not going to let the British get hold of me, if I can help it."

"That is right; and you, Bob, will do well to keep your eyes open, though I don't think you will be likely to encounter any of the enemy in that direction."

"I shall keep a lookout for them, sir," said Bob.

Then the youths placed the dispatches in their pockets, and bidding Washington good-by, they saluted and withdrew.

Ten minutes later, disguised as well-to-do farmers, they rode down the slope leading to the road together, and, reaching the road, they parted, one riding toward the south, the other toward the north.

CHAPTER II.

A LITTLE ENCOUNTER.

Dick had laid out the course which he purposed traveling in going to Peekskill.

He would go nearly due north till he came to the Passaic River.

He would cross the river at a small town called Pompton.

Pompton was on the north side of the river, and a little north of due west from Hackensack.

It was distant fifteen miles from Hackensack, so Dick did not think there was any danger of encountering British soldiers there.

Dobb's Ferry was about as much north of due east from Pompton as Hackensack was south of it.

He would go to Pompton, get his dinner, and then ride to Dobb's Ferry, and cross the Hudson, after which he would keep on in a northern direction, parallel with the river until he reached his destination.

This was his plan, and it was a very good one.

Dick was mounted upon a magnificent charger which he had captured from the British several months before.

Dick had named the horse "Major," and a noble animal Major was.

He had saved Dick from capture on more than one occasion simply as a result of his unusual speed and bottom.

Dick thought a great deal of Major, and always felt safe when mounted on his back.

He rode onward at as swift a gait as was possible under the circumstances.

The snow made it bad going.

Major made very good speed, however.

He was strong and willing.

The distance to Pompton was about eighteen miles.

Dick made the distance in less than three hours.

He reached the river, and crossed on a bridge, and entered the town at half-past eleven o'clock.

He inquired of a boy the way to a tavern, and the boy

pointed a building out to him, and vouchsafed the information that it was the only tavern in the place.

Dick thanked the boy and rode to the tavern.

Dismounting, he called the hostler.

"Give my horse good care," he said; "feed and water him, and then rub him down. Don't let him drink too much water all at once."

"All right, sir," the man responded, and he led the horse away in the direction of the barn at the rear of the tavern.

Dick entered the building.

"Can you furnish me with a meal?" he asked of the man who sat behind the counter, which was at once desk and bar—for wines and liquors were sold here.

"I always have plenty of food and drink for all good king's men," was the reply, with a searching glance at the youth.

"Well, that includes me," said Dick, calmly; "I'm as good a king's man as you will find in a day's search."

"Glad ter heer et! Glad ter heer et!" the man, who was a big, wicked-looking fellow, said. "Whar ye frum?" he asked, with an air of curiosity.

"From down Trenton-way," was the reply.

"Oh, frum down thar, hey? Hez Cornwallis captured Washington an' his gang uv rebels yit?"

"No, and I don't think he will be able to do so soon."

The man looked at Dick inquiringly, and also somewhat suspiciously.

"Ye don't think so?" he asked.

"I do not."

"Why not?"

"For the reason that Washington and the rebels have the best of it just now."

"Whut d'ye mean by sech talk ez thet? The las' we heerd heer, Cornwallis hed Washington an' his gang of rebels cooped up in atween a crick an' ther Dellyware River, an' expected ier capter ther hull gang without no trouble er tall."

"Then you haven't heard the latest," said Dick, quietly.

"No?"

"No."

"Whut's ther latest, then?"

"Washington and his gang of rebels slipped away in the night, went around the left wing of the British forces, marched to Princeton, meeting and defeating a force of two thousand British on the way, took the stores that were at Princeton, and marched to Morristown Heights, where they are now, occupying an impregnable position. Cornwallis and his army has retreated to New Brunswick."

"Ye don't mean et!"

The man fairly gasped the words.

"I do mean it," said Dick, quietly.

The landlord was about to say something more, when the door opened and half a dozen men in the uniform of British soldiers entered the room.

Dick was surprised to see the soldiers here.

He wondered what they could be doing over here so far away from their army.

He did not show his surprise, however; and if he felt a fear that he might get into trouble, he did not show that, either.

He eyed the newcomers coolly and calmly.

"Hev ye heerd the news?" cried the landlord, eagerly and excitedly, advancing to meet the newcomers; "hev ye heerd whut hez happened?"

"No, what has happened?" asked one of the redcoats, with a curious and inquiring look at Dick.

"Why Washington an' his gang uv rebels hez escaped frum Cornwallis arter ail, an' they hev come up ter Morristown an' took up their persitions thar; an' Cornwallis hez retreated back to New Brunswick!"

"Who says so?" the redcoat asked.

"This young man heer hez jes' be'n a-tellin' me."

The landlord pointed to Dick.

"Oh, he told you, eh?"

The redcoats were all eyeing Dick rather searchingly.

"Yes, he tole me."

The redcoat's lip curled in a sneer.

"Well, do you know what I think?" he asked.

"No; what?"

"Well, I think this young man has been filling you up full of fish stories, old man!"

The landlord started, and looked at Dick quickly and searchingly; also somewhat suspiciously.

"Is thet so, young feller?" he asked.

Dick smiled coldly, while he gazed straight into the eyes of the redcoat who had done the talking so far.

There was a look of cool scorn in Dick's eyes that made the redcoat feel uncomfortable.

"I am not in the habit of telling what is not true, landlord," he said, quietly and coldly; "the rebels are now at Morristown Heights, in an impregnable position, and Cornwallis and his army are now at New Brunswick."

"I don't believe a word of it!" burst from the lips of the redcoat.

"You need not if it strains your credulity," said Dick, coolly. "I am sure it matters not to me whether you believe it or whether you do not. It is true, just the same, as you will right speedily learn."

"Ha! Be careful, young man!" cried the redcoat, an-

grily. "Don't anger me, for I am dangerous when I am angered."

Dick was beginning to get angry.

He was one who could not brook brow-beating, and was not disposed to submit to it.

"I imagine you think yourself a great deal more dangerous than you really are," the youth said, with a cold air of quiet scorn.

This enraged the redcoat, and his face flushed as red as fire.

"Why, you insolent young hound!" he cried; "I have half a mind to give you a thrashing."

He advanced threateningly as he spoke.

Dick did not manifest any symptoms of alarm.

He was perfectly cool and self-contained.

"I should advise you not to attempt it," he said, calmly.

"Why not?"

The fellow evidently was puzzled by Dick's cool and collected bearing.

"For the reason that it will not be healthy for you if you attempt it."

"Bah! What would you do?"

"Protect myself."

Dick was outwardly calm, but inwardly he was somewhat wrought up.

He hoped the fellow would attack him.

He wished to knock some sense into the redcoat's head.

He liked to knock redcoats down whenever the opportunity presented, anyway.

He enjoyed it on general principles.

And he had taken a sudden and violent dislike to this particular redcoat, and would like nothing better than to give him a lesson which he was evidently needing so badly.

"Oh, you'd protect yourself, eh?"

The fellow's tone was sneering.

"I would."

"See here, who are you, anyway?" the redcoat asked, a peculiar light in his eyes.

Dick realized that the fellow was suspicious.

Evidently the redcoat suspected him of being a rebel.

Dick had expected this.

So he betrayed no signs of surprise or fear on account of the question.

"I don't know that it's any of your business who I am," the youth replied promptly and decidedly.

"Oh, you don't, eh?"

The redcoat's tone was ironical.

"I do not."

"Oh, all right; but, say, do you know what I think?"

"I don't know, and I care a great deal less."

"You will care before I get through with you."

"Do you think so?"

"I know so."

"You mean you think you know."

"No, I know."

"No!"

Dick was having a little sport at the redcoat's expense.

He seemed to realize this fact, for he grew even redder in the face, and seemed to swell up with anger.

"Take care, or you'll burst!" said Dick.

This was the straw too much, and with a hoarse bellow of rage, the redcoat leaped toward Dick.

He struck out straight for the youth's face.

He would have landed the blow had he been dealing with one who was less quick and skillful than Dick.

Dick was not taken by surprise.

He had been watching the fellow closely, and knew he was going to attack as soon as the fellow knew it himself.

He could tell by the expression of the man's eyes.

So when the fellow struck out Dick simply leaped to one side, avoiding the blow, and then he in his turn shot out his fist.

The blow caught the redcoat just under the ear, and he went down with a thump.

A cry of surprise and anger escaped the fellow's companions.

They seemed on the point of rushing upon Dick.

He leaped back and got in readiness to receive them.

But the man who had been knocked down got up and waved his companions back.

His face was the picture of rage and fury.

"He is my game!" he cried. "Leave him to me!"

Then he rushed forward, intending to force Dick back by superior weight.

He made a mistake in this.

He was heavier than Dick, but not stronger.

Dick, when he desired to do so, could prove himself possessed of more than ordinary strength.

In fact, he was phenomenally strong.

And he was quick.

He avoided the rush of the redcoat, stepped to one side, seized the fellow by the collar and waistband, and, lifting him high in the air above his head, held him kicking and struggling there.

It was a wonderful exhibition of strength, and the witnesses of the affair stared in open-mouthed amazement.

They had never seen anything like it.

They would not have believed that a youth of the size of Dick could be possessed of such strength.

"Let me down!" roared the redcoat.

"If you will promise to behave yourself I will let you down," said Dick, quietly.

"I promise nothing. Let me down, I say, or I'll——"
"What?"

"I'll make you suffer when I do get down!"

"My friend, you will be in no condition to make any one suffer when you get down, unless you give me the promise," said Dick, coldly; "for I shall throw you down upon the floor with all my might, and you will be lucky if you are not killed by the shock."

Dick would not do this; he had no intention of doing it, but he wished to give the fellow a good fright.

"You must not!—you dare not!" the fellow howled in sudden fear. "Men, help, here! Rescue me from the hands of this fiend!"

The men rushed forward to attack Dick.

He whirled upon them.

"Back!" he cried.

The men did not stop.

There was not much time for reflection.

The fellow's comrades would be upon Dick in a jiffy.

Dick did not wish to injure the redcoat seriously by throwing him on the floor.

So he decided to make use of him as a weapon of defense.

He hurled the redcoat with all his might into the faces of the five who were rushing to attack him.

Dick threw the fellow with all his force.

The weapon was an effective one, for the five were knocked down in a heap on the floor, with the fellow who had been used as a projectile on top of them.

CHAPTER III.

DICK ROUTS SIX REDCOATS.

The landlord held up his hands in astonishment.

He had never seen anything equal to this in all his experience.

It was the first time he had ever seen one man floor six at a single stroke.

"Is dinner ready, landlord?" asked Dick, calmly turning to that worthy.

"Yes, sir; yes—it's ready," was the reply.

"Very well; lead the way into the dining-room."

The landlord gave a wondering glance, and then led the way into the adjoining room.

Dick followed, and was seated at a table, ready for his dinner by the time the six redcoats struggled to their feet.

"Have my dinner served immediately, landlord," said Dick.

"Yes, sir—certainly, sir; but them fellers out thar—won't they——"

"I will attend to them, sir," was the cool remark. "You attend to your part of the business and I will look out for mine."

The landlord hastened out of the room, entering what was evidently the kitchen, and as he did so the six redcoats rushed into the dining-room.

"Where is he?—where is the scoundrel who——"

They paused with a suddenness that was almost comical, and stared at Dick in amazement and fear.

Dick had seen them coming, and had drawn both his pistols, and now he sat there, his elbows on the table, the two pistols threatening the redcoats.

"Easy, gentlemen!—easy!" he said, calmly and coldly; "if you come any farther, or make any attempt to draw weapons, I shall fire, and I warn you that I am a dead shot, and shall shoot to kill! I am a peaceable man, and have no desire to take the blood of any of you, but I shall protect myself, you may be sure of that!"

The six men did seem to be sure of it.

They did not attempt to come any farther.

They stared at the determined face of the youth for a few moments in silence, and then turned, and, muttering threateningly, returned to the other room.

The landlord appeared just then with Dick's dinner, and the youth laid the pistols down beside his plate and proceeded to dispose of the meal as coolly and calmly as he would have done had there been no redcoats in the other room.

The landlord was greatly impressed by Dick's cool bearing.

He was very respectful, much to the youth's secret amazement.

The landlord went into the front room, and the redcoats went up to the bar and called for some liquor.

"They want to get some fictitious courage," thought Dick; "if they get much of that stuff down them, they may make me trouble, for when a man gets too much liquor, he has no sense. I'll finish my dinner as quickly as possible and get away before their potations have had time to have much effect."

This was only prudent.

Six to one is too great odds, and they could easily have overpowered Dick had they attacked him simultaneously.

The trouble had been that when Dick's pistols covered them each man feared he would be one of the two who

would be killed, and none of them had had the courage to make an attack.

But if they got enough liquor down they would not have sense enough to be afraid.

This Dick realized, and he ate rapidly.

He soon finished his meal.

He stuck one of the pistols back in his belt.

The other he took in his left hand.

Then he rose from the table and strode out of the dining-room and into the front room.

The six were drinking at the bar, and they looked at the youth askance.

They made no move toward attacking him, however.

The liquor had not had time to work as yet.

"What's the bill, landlord?" asked Dick.

"Let's see; et wuz er feed fur yerself an' yer hoss both, wuzn't et?" he asked.

"Yes."

The landlord named a sum, and Dick drew some silver and gold from his pocket with his right hand and paid the bill.

"Order my horse brought at once," he said.

"Yes, sir—certainly, sir."

The landlord left the room, and was gone perhaps five minutes.

"While he was absent Dick walked to the fireplace, and stood with his back to the flames, his face being toward the six redcoats.

They glowered at Dick, and he returned the look with one of calm defiance.

They were six to one, but they were afraid to start a fight with the one.

Dick held a pistol in his hand, ready for instant use, and they felt that before they could draw their weapons one would fall to the floor dead or mortally wounded.

Each one thought that he might be that one.

So all held back.

They were unwilling to take the risk.

Presently the landlord returned.

"The hoss will be ready in a minnet, sir," he said.

"Thank you," said Dick.

Dick waited, and presently the hostler stuck his head in at the door.

"Hoss ready, sir," he said.

"Very well," said Dick. "Good-day, landlord," and with the words, Dick walked quietly to the door, opened it and stepped out of doors.

He had kept his eyes on the redcoats as he crossed the room.

If they intended attacking him, they would do it then, he was sure.

They made no attack, however.

They saw the youth was on his guard, and were afraid to attempt it.

The youth's prowess and indomitable nerve had impressed them fully as much as it had the landlord.

Hence Dick was allowed to take his departure unmolested.

Dick gave the hostler a small piece of silver, and asked:

"Have you a pistol?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Will you do me a favor?"

The hostler was an honest-looking fellow.

The gift of the bit of silver had made him Dick's friend, too.

"Yes, sir; if I can, sir."

"You can; those five men in there will, I more than half suspect, have you bring their horses around as soon as I have gone, and they will mount and follow me. If they do so, will you fire off your pistol as soon as they have started, so as to let me know of the fact?"

"Yes, I'll do that, sir."

"Very well," and Dick mounted and rode away.

He rode at a gallop for a short distance, and then as soon as he was out of the town and out of sight from the tavern, he slowed Major down to a walk.

Dick listened intently.

Perhaps ten minutes had elapsed when there came the sound of a pistol-shot from the direction of the little town.

"The signal!" exclaimed Dick; "it is just as I expected. Those fellows are anxious to get revenge on me, and have followed in the hope that they may be able to overtake me and catch me at a disadvantage. Well, the knowledge of their intentions is sufficient to enable me to checkmate them."

Dick rode onward at a gallop for perhaps half a mile.

Then he slackened speed.

He had been thinking about the redcoats who were following him.

The idea of their dogging him in this manner made Dick angry.

The more he thought of it the angrier he got.

"The scoundrels!" he murmured; "why could they not have been satisfied to remain in the town, and let me go my way in peace? Well, they have chosen to follow me for the purpose of trying to shoot me when I am not looking, and they must take the consequences. I am going to bring this affair to a focus, and have it ended very quickly."

Dick had sized the six redcoats up pretty closely.

He was sure they were cowards at heart.

Had they not been, they would most certainly have attacked him in the dining-room.

True, he had had the advantage of having his pistols out and leveled, but they were six to one.

No, they were arrant cowards.

Dick was sure of it.

And he felt that they would not attack him openly, were they to overtake him on the road.

Their intention was to follow him, and try to catch him at a disadvantage.

Dick was sure that he could put the entire gang to flight.

All that would be necessary would be to take them by surprise.

This he could do by hiding in the timber at the side of the road, and riding out suddenly and confronting them as they came along.

Dick decided to do this.

Even if the fellows showed fight he had four pistols, and was sure that he would be more than a match for all six of them.

He would risk it, anyhow.

He did not wish to have them dogging him all the rest of the afternoon.

It would be more satisfactory to settle the affair once and for all.

He looked back.

The road he was following was crooked, winding this way and that, through the timber.

He could not see more than a quarter of a mile back in the direction from which he had come.

The redcoats were not in sight.

Dick left the road and entered the timber at the side.

He paused just within the edge of the timber, and took up his station just behind a large tree.

The British soldiers would not be expecting any such move on Dick's part.

Consequently they would not be scrutinizing the timber at the side of the road.

So he would be in very little danger of being discovered until he was pleased to show himself.

Dick drew two pistols, and, cocking them, waited patiently for the approach of the redcoats.

Presently he heard voices.

The snow, almost a foot thick, deadened the sound of the horses' hoofs.

Dick leaned forward, and peered around the trunk of the tree.

The redcoats were coming.

They were seventy-five yards distant, and were evidently

utterly unsuspecting of the trick that was about to be played on them.

They were talking in rather a loud key, but they were not laughing.

They were too angry over the manner in which they had been backed down by a beardless boy to laugh much.

They were telling, however, in rather extravagant language what they would do to Dick when they overtook him.

Dick heard and understood.

"The liquor is taking effect," he thought; "perhaps they may not scare, after all, with such a large amount of artificial courage on hand."

The youth was determined to risk it, however.

He felt that the surprise would more than counteract the strength of the artificial courage the fellows had taken on.

He waited till they were within ten yards of them, and then he suddenly rode out into the road in front of the redcoats.

As he came he shouted:

"Now I have you, you cowardly scoundrels! You shall not escape me!"

At the same time he fired one pistol, then the other.

He did not try to kill either of the fellows, but one of the bullets struck the fellow who had done most of the talking in the tavern, and he gave a yell of pain and fright.

"I'm killed!" he howled, and, whirling his horse, he fled back down the road as fast as he could make the poor beast go.

The others uttered cries of fright also, and followed the example of their illustrious leader.

Within ten seconds of the time Dick had fired the shots and shouted the words given above, the six redcoats were in full flight down the road, and within thirty seconds they were entirely out of sight around a bend in the road.

Dick had won a quick and decisive victory.

He had put the enemy to flight very quickly.

Then the comicality of the whole affair struck Dick.

He laughed aloud.

"That beats any experience I have had yet!" he murmured. "Well, I don't think they will bother me any more."

Then he turned his horse's head and rode on his way as if nothing had occurred out of the ordinary.

CHAPTER IV.

AT PEEKSKILL.

Dick kept on his way, and made very good speed, despite the heavy roads.

Major was strong and well, and kept going at good speed without any special urging.

Dick's general direction was eastward.

It was about eighteen miles to the river.

Dick was there by three o'clock.

The town and ferry boat were on the opposite side.

Dick was afraid he would have a hard time attracting the attention of the ferryman.

He decided that the quickest way would be to fire his pistol as a signal.

This he did.

Then he waved his hat.

Sitting on his horse on the shore, he was sure the ferryman could see him.

It turned out that the ferryman both saw Dick and heard the pistol-shot.

Presently Dick saw the boat leaving the farther shore.

It came across, and when it touched the shore Dick led the horse onto the boat.

It was the same man who had ferried Dick and Bob across the river several times when they were carrying dispatches from Washington at Hackensack to Lee at North Castle.

He recognized Dick.

He seemed glad to see the youth, and asked regarding the situation down in New Jersey.

He had not yet heard of the smooth manner in which Washington had outgeneraled Cornwallis, and when Dick told him, he was delighted, for he was a staunch patriot.

When they reached the other side, Dick paid the ferryman; and, mounting, rode away in the direction of Tarrytown.

It was only a little more than half an hour's ride.

Major had had a little breathing spell while they were crossing the river, and Dick rode at a good gait leaving Dobb's Ferry.

He did not stop at Tarrytown, but rode right on through the village.

Fifteen minutes later he arrived at the home of Bob's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Estabrook.

It was also the home of Dick's sweetheart, beautiful Alice Estabrook.

One would have thought that Dick would have stopped there.

He did not, however.

It was only a few hundred yards farther to the home of his widowed mother, and the youth felt that he owed the first duty to her.

He could return later and see his sweetheart.

When Dick dismounted, tied his horse and entered his

mother's house, she gave vent to a glad cry, and, catching Dick in her arms, hugged and kissed him.

"Oh, my boy! my darling son! Is it indeed you?" she cried, tears of joy streaming down her cheeks.

"Yes, there is no mistake about it, mother," said Dick, smiling, but with a suspicious tremor in his tones.

Then he kissed Edith, who was as glad to see Dick as any sister could possibly be to see a brother.

"You want to know where Bob is, and why he did not come with me," laughed Dick. "I can see the question in your eyes, Edie."

"So I do, Dick," with a blush; "tell me, please."

"Well, if good luck has favored him, Bob is now in Philadelphia."

"In Philadelphia?"

"Yes."

"What is he doing there, Dick?"

"He went there to take a dispatch to General Putnam, for the commander-in-chief."

"Then he is well?—he has not been wounded?"

"Bob wounded?" with a little laugh! "not he! And he was well this morning when I parted from him at Morristown Heights."

"Oh, I am so glad to hear that! And—did he send no word to me, Dick?"

"Yes, he told me to give you a hug and a lot of kisses for him, Edie—and here they are!"

Then Dick gave Edith a hug and some kisses, and the girl laughed and blushed.

"That was just like Bob!" she said.

"Yes, quite like him, Edie. Bob is a noble fellow—just the best fellow any boy ever had for a friend."

Then Dick told where he was going, and explained that he could stay but a very short time.

"I will stop longer on my way back," he said; "but I must hasten on, and deliver the dispatches to Clinton at Peekskill as soon as possible. I will run over and say 'How do you do?' to Alice and the folks, and then come back and resume my journey."

"I suppose Bob sent some hugs and kisses to Alice, and you have to deliver them, Dick?" said Edith, demurely.

Dick blushed, and then laughed.

"Now, Edie," he said, "if you don't stop treating me so I shall make Bob deliver his own hugs and kisses—the ones for you, I mean."

"I'm afraid that would suit her all the better, Dick!" said his mother, with a smile.

"I guess it wouldn't be a severe punishment," with a grin; "well, I'll run over to Mr. Estabrook's."

"There's a well beaten path through the orchard, Dick,"

said his mother; "we run back and forth so often that we have got a good path."

"I'm glad of that, mother."

Dick made his way over to Mr. Estabrook's house, and was greeted cordially by Alice's parents, while Alice—well, she was just the happiest girl in the State of New York.

It had been several weeks since she had seen Dick, and she had heard from him only once during that time.

Dick explained why Bob had not come with him, and while his parents said they would have been glad to see him, yet at the same time they said they were happy in the knowledge that he was well, and doing his duty as a soldier.

Dick explained that he was the bearer of dispatches to Clinton at Peekskill, and that he could remain but a short time, and Alice's parents presently withdrew and left Dick and Alice alone together.

The two young lovers sat side by side and talked—well, of things that interested them, which would not interest you, dear reader, so I will not disclose their conversation.

The time passed very rapidly, and Dick had been there more than half an hour, when he suddenly bethought himself that he must go.

He gave Alice a final hug and kiss, and then after promising to stop longer on the return trip, he went and bade Mr. and Mrs. Estabrook good-by, and took his departure, Alice accompanying him to Dick's mother's house.

Then, after a few words, Dick bade them all good-by, and, mounting, rode away toward the north.

At the turn in the road, he half turned in his saddle, looked back, waved his hand, receiving waves in return.

Then Dick rode onward at a good gait.

His general course was north, but he would have to go a mile or a mile and a half to the west before reaching Peekskill.

"I ought to make it by dark," thought Dick; "I guess I can. I'll try, at any rate."

It was about fourteen miles from Dick's home to Peekskill, and he made the trip in a little more than two hours.

He got there at a quarter to six o'clock.

He gave his horse into the charge of an orderly at General Clinton's headquarters, and then was shown into the presence of the officer.

The officer greeted Dick pleasantly.

It was the first time he had ever seen the youth.

Likewise it was the first time Dick had ever seen him.

"I am the bearer of dispatches from the commander-in-chief, sir," said Dick, and he drew the documents from his pocket and handed them to the officer.

"Ah! Excuse me, while I read them, my boy."

Dick bowed, and the officer broke the seal on the papers and opened them.

He read rapidly, and when he had finished, he said:

"Good! I am to move upon Hackensack at the earliest possible moment, and attack the British at that point. You have just come up through that region, my boy; how is everything down there? And how about getting across the river?"

"I did not come anywhere near Hackensack," replied Dick. "I went north from Morristown Heights to Pompton, and east from there to Dobb's Ferry. As for crossing the river, I think you can cross at Dobb's Ferry. The ferryman there is a staunch patriot."

"Very well; I think I shall go down to Dobb's Ferry on this side of the river, and then cross at that point."

"How soon will you move, sir?" asked Dick.

"Within two hours, I think. I wish to reach Hackensack and attack early in the morning, if possible."

"Very well; in going you will pass my home, which is near Tarrytown, and if you have no objections I will, as soon as I have eaten something and my horse has rested and been fed, go on ahead, and join the troops when you come along."

"Very well, my boy, you have my permission."

Then Dick withdrew, after thanking the officer, and he went to where he could get something to eat.

He knew his horse had been well taken care of, and when he himself had eaten he felt very well satisfied.

"I will wait a few minutes and then take the back track," he said to himself, and he spent the time in telling the soldiers the story of the wonderful doings of Washington down at Trenton.

The men were delighted to hear of the wonderful work of the patriot soldiers, and they were glad to know that they were to move on Hackensack. They wished to be doing something, too.

Then Dick got Major, mounted and rode away into the darkness.

"I'll have two or three hours at home, anyway," he thought.

And the thought pleased him very much, for he knew that Alice would be at his mother's house.

She had told Dick she would be there when he told her he would be back as soon as he could get back.

Dick was not to exceed three-quarters of an hour in reaching his mother's house.

It was not yet late.

The folks were looking for him, and would not have gone to bed, even had it been late.

There was a light in the house.

"They're waiting for me," thought Dick; "how I wish I could stay longer than a few hours!"

Dick would have enjoyed spending a week at home.

But he would not have done so had he been given permission to do so.

He knew that his services were needed in the patriot army, and he would not stay here and enjoy himself when he could be doing good work for the cause of liberty.

Dick rode around to the stable at the rear of the house and led Major into a stall, as there was no need of letting the noble animal stand out in the cold.

Then Dick hastened to the house.

He did not pause to knock.

He would announce himself by appearing in person.

He pushed the door open and entered the house quickly.

The sight which met Dick's eyes was a startling one.

CHAPTER V.

"YES, DICK SLATER IS HERE!"

After Dick had disappeared from sight that afternoon when he had ridden away from his mother's house, Mrs. Slater and Edith, and Alice Estabrook had gone back into the house, and had sat down to talk of the brave and handsome youth and praise him.

Alice condoled with Edith because of Bob's not coming with Dick.

"Well, maybe Bob will come next time," said Edith.

"Maybe so; I hope so," said Alice; "but if only one can come, I would rather it should be Dick. Isn't that selfishness personified!" with a little laugh.

Mrs. Slater smiled.

She had been young once, and understood how Alice felt.

"It's just the opposite with me," said Edith; "I would rather Bob had come!—and Dick is my brother, too, the same as Bob is yours."

"To satisfy both of you girls, both boys would have to come," said Mrs. Slater.

"I guess you are right," smiled Alice.

They talked till supper time, and then Alice went over home and ate supper, after which she came back over to Mrs. Slater's.

They talked till half-past nine o'clock, and at just about that hour there came a knock on the door.

The three were somewhat startled at first.

Then a thought struck Alice.

"It's father and mother, I guess," she said.

"Likely you are right," replied Mrs. Slater, and she went to the door and opened it.

It was not Alice's parents.

Instead, three men stood there.

Mrs. Slater gave utterance to a little cry of fright, and would have closed the door, but one of the men pushed her back and stepped across the threshold.

The other two followed, and all three were in the house.

They closed the door and placed their backs against it.

"What does this mean, Mr. Bilkins?" asked Mrs. Slater, in a faltering voice.

She recognized the men.

They were neighbors, and lived within a mile of her house.

They were rank Tories, however.

They were loyal to King George.

They were cowardly, though, and instead of joining the British army and fighting like brave and honest men, they remained at home and made war on the unprotected families of their patriot neighbors.

Six months before a gang of Tories had rode up in front of this same house.

They had picked a quarrel with Mr. Slater, Dick's father, and had shot him down in cold blood.

The leader of the gang, Hank Scroggs, had paid the penalty of this act on the spot, for Dick had shot him down with his father's rifle, but the others had escaped.

These three men who stood in the house now had been members of that gang on that day.

They had threatened that they would have Dick's life for the shooting of Hank Scroggs, but although they had attempted to get hold of him on one or two occasions, they had failed.

Mrs. Slater was aware of this, and her mother's intuition told her that that was what these men were here for on this night.

"They have heard that Dick was here to-day," she thought, "and they think that perhaps he is here now."

The reply of Joe Bilkins to her question of "What does this mean?" proved she was right, for the man said, gruffly:

"Whar's thet boy u' your'n?"

Mrs. Slater looked surprised, making a very good attempt at acting.

"Do you mean Dick?" she asked.

"Ye know I mean Dick," was the reply; "whar is he?"

The men looked around the room as the question was asked.

They seemed to think the object of their query was in the room hidden.

"Dick is not here," said Mrs. Slater.

"I know better!" was the reply; "he wuz heer this afternoon, an' he said he would be back in three er four hours."

Mrs. Slater was pretty badly frightened, as were the girls also.

All three were pale.

"How do you know he was here?" Mrs. Slater asked; "did you see him?"

"No, but I know he wuz heer, jes' the same."

"Well, what if he was?" flashed Alice Estabrook, who knew the three men, and hated them heartily. "That doesn't prove that he is here now. I only wish he weré here!" drawing herself up, and her beautiful eyes flashing scornfully; "you would not talk so boldly if he were!"

"Indeed they wouldn't!" said Edith, with spirit.

"Hush, children," said Mrs. Slater, who feared the girls would anger the men and make them more liable to do some damage.

Joe Bilkins and his two companions frowned and looked angry.

"That talk is made jes' ter try ter throw us off the scent," said Bilkins; "Dick is heer, an' we want 'im!"

The ruffians had all three advanced half way across the room as Joe was talking, and they now stood within five feet of the woman and girls and glared at them threateningly.

Their backs were toward the door, of course, and they could not see the door, which came open at the instant Bilkins was speaking, and Dick Slater stepped across the threshold to see the spectacle of the three ruffians confronting his loved ones.

He heard and understood what Bilkins said, too, and his eyes flashed and his face took on a stern expression as he cried out in a ringing voice:

"Yes, Dick Slater is here, Joe Bilkins! And now, what are you going to do about it?"

CHAPTER VI.

DICK ON DECK.

A little cry of half joy, half fright, escaped the girls' lips.

They were glad to see Dick appear at this opportune moment, and yet they were somewhat afraid, too, for the

odds of three to one was great, and the thought came to them that he might be killed.

Mrs. Slater gave utterance to a little cry of delight and fear commingled, and then all three waited breathlessly for the next act in the thrilling drama.

The three men sprang back as though they had suddenly been confronted by a ghost.

Their faces turned pale.

They gave a gasp, for they were arrant cowards, and then they stared at the youth as if paralyzed.

This was for only a few moments.

They recovered the use of their faculties presently and made a movement as one man to draw their pistols.

But Dick was watching them.

He saw the movement.

And he beat the fellows at their own game.

Before they had half drawn their pistols in their nervous and clumsy fashion, he had whisked his pistols out and had covered the three.

"Hands up, or you are dead men!" he cried in his clear ringing voice.

The men did not hesitate.

They knew Dick was a soldier.

They were aware that he had been in the patriot army six months, and had been engaged in a number of battles.

They knew also that he had gained a great reputation for bravery and daring both as a soldier and as a spy among the British.

Hence they reasoned that he would not hesitate to shoot.

And at such close range he could not miss the mark aimed at.

The three were very solicitous regarding the welfare of their precious bodies.

So they elevated their hands at once.

Bilkins did even more.

His craven heart was torn with fear.

His knees were almost knocking together so great was his fright.

His teeth were almost chattering.

He gazed into the cold, stern eyes of Dick as if fascinated.

"Please d-don't s-shoot, D-Dick!" he whined; "w-won't h-hurt y-ye ef y-ye won't s-shoot."

A smile of scorn appeared on Dick's face.

"You cowardly cur!" the youth said, scathingly; "course you won't hurt me! I am not at all afraid of you doing so, so long as my face is turned in your direction. My back was turned, and you could muster up courage to get close enough, you might strike me in the back

run; that's all! No, I'm not afraid of your hurting me—not the least bit!"

Dick's voice was very stern.

The other two fellows were almost as badly frightened as Bilkins.

They trembled perceptibly, and shrank back from the muzzles of the pistols.

"W-we'll go, D-Dick!" said one.

"Y-yes, w-we'll go at once!" from the other.

They were eager to get away now.

The pistols Dick held pointed at their heads were cocked, and they were afraid he might accidentally pull the triggers.

They would be struck by the bullets, and might be killed or seriously wounded.

And like all such worthless scamps, they placed a higher valuation on their lives than most brave men do.

"Yes, you will go," said Dick, cold and calmly, "but you will wait till I tell you to go! I have a few words to say to you fellows first, and I want you to listen closely and give heed to the words. Do you understand?" and Dick looked straight at Bilkins.

"Y-yes, sir; yes, D-Dick," was the reply.

"What I wish to say," went on Dick, "is this: I have just come in here to find you three big, cowardly scoundrels threatening and attempting to terrorize these defenseless women. For that you deserve to be shot; but I am not going to shoot you—this time. If, however—now mark what I am saying, for I mean every word of it!" and Dick gave the fellows a look that made them shiver, it was so stern and fierce; "if you fellows ever come around here again, or attempt to bother with or frighten my mother and sister, or Miss Estabrook, I will hunt you down and shoot you on sight like the cowardly curs that you are! Do you understand?"

The fellows shivered and cowered.

There was something terrible in the tone of the youth's voice.

There was no mistaking the deadly earnestness of the youth.

The men felt that he would do as he said.

"W-we'll n-never e-come aroun' heer, D-Dick!" chattered Bilkins; "w-we w-won't bother none uv yer wimmen folks!"

"If you do I'll kill you!"

Dick's tone was cold and grim.

The words were few, but the fellows felt that he meant what he said.

And from what they knew of him they were sure he would do as he said.

Dick waited a few moments for the fellows to have time to grasp what he had said, and then he said in a quiet, cold tone:

"You may go now."

The men availed themselves of the opportunity at once.

It was comical to see the manner in which they hurried to the door, opened it and hastened out into the night.

Dick did not smile, however.

The stern look did not leave his face.

He followed them to the door, and as they hastened away he called out:

"Remember what I have said!"

There was no reply, but this did not worry Dick.

The fellows would not forget.

They had been too badly frightened to do so.

They would remember, and Dick was sure that they stood in such fear of him that they would stay away from the vicinity.

He closed the door, barred it, and turned to greet his loved ones.

"Oh, Dick, I am so glad you came!" exclaimed Alice Estabrook, impulsively, and then she blushed.

"Yes, indeed; so are we all, Dick!" said his mother.

"We were afraid those dreadful men would hurt you, though, Dick!" said Edith.

"And is there not danger that they will hang around here and try to do you injury when you leave the house, to continue on your journey, Dick?" his mother asked; "but can you not stay all night, my son?" she added, quickly.

"No, I can't stay all night, mother," replied Dick; "but I shall stay till the patriot troops come along. That will be three or four hours."

"Have you had your supper?" asked Mrs. Slater.

"Yes, mother; I am not hungry."

Then they sat down and entered into conversation.

As Dick's time with them was to be brief, they would make the most of it.

The time passed very swiftly.

It seemed as if it had been scarcely an hour that Dick had been there when he told them that he heard the sound made by the approaching force of patriot soldiers.

He opened the door, and the tramping of hundreds of feet could be plainly heard.

Dick went out to the road as the front ranks of the long column approached, and found the commander riding at the head.

Dick made himself known, and was greeted pleasantly by Clinton.

"I will remain here a little longer, sir," Dick said; "and then I will follow, and will overtake you by the time you reach Dobb's Ferry."

"Very well, Dick," and the officer rode on.

"It will take them nearly two hours to march to Dobb's Ferry," said Dick, when he had re-entered the house; "I can ride it in three-quarters of an hour, so I can stay yet another hour with you."

This pleased Mrs. Slater and the girls.

The hour passed only too quickly, and then Dick rose to go.

He kissed his mother and sister, and then took Alice in his arms, and gave her a hug and a kiss.

"Good-by, sweetheart," he said.

"Good-by, Dick," with a blush, and then the tears came to the beautiful eyes; "oh, be very, very careful, Dick!" she murmured, "and don't get killed. Just think of how your mother and sister, and—and—of how I would feel, Dick! It would kill us, if—if you were to be killed! Do be careful, won't you, Dick?"

"Of course I will be careful, Alice, dear!" the youth replied. "No one with a sweetheart like you could ever be reckless of his life, Alice. He would wish to live for her sake. I will be as careful as it is possible for me to be, you may be sure of that."

"And tell Bob to be careful, Dick," said Edith, pleadingly; "he is so impulsive that he is liable to rush headlong into danger at almost any time. Tell him I said for him to be careful, won't you please, Dick?"

"Of course I will, little sister. I'll look after Bob. He is as brave as a lion, and always ready to fight to the last ditch, but he is remarkably cool-headed, just the same, and not at all likely to lose his head and be simply reckless. Bob is all right, Edith!"

"I can add nothing to what the girls have said, Dick, my son," said Mrs. Slater; "I can only ask, with them, that you and Bob be as careful as you possibly can be, for it would kill us to lose you."

"We will both be careful," reiterated Dick, and then he gave them another kiss around, and with a "good-by," he hurried out of the house, got Major, and, mounting, rode away down the road in the direction taken by the patriot troops.

Dick rode at a gallop.

The night was clear, and he could see the road quite plainly.

Then, too, Major had had a good rest, and was ready to go as fast as his young master wished to travel.

Dick overtook the rear end of the column while it was still half a mile from Dobb's Ferry.

As he was in no hurry, he slowed down, and followed along behind the men.

There was no need of forcing Major to ride at the side of the road the rest of the way.

Fifteen minutes later they were at the ferry.

One boat-load was already on its way across.

It was a big job getting the patriot soldiers across the river.

There was but the one ferry-boat, and it took a number of trips.

All were across at last, however, and then began the tedious march toward Hackensack.

The distance to that point was in the neighborhood of nine miles.

It would take the soldiers about four hours to march the distance.

This would bring them to Hackensack early in the morning.

And this was what was desired by Clinton, the American commander.

The march was a tedious and tiresome one, but the men did not complain.

They had been cooped up at Peekskill, and had had no opportunity to fight the redcoats, and now that there was a prospect of an engagement they were eager to reach their destination.

At last, shortly after daybreak, Hackensack was reached.

General Clinton ordered his men to advance to the attack without delay, and they responded enthusiastically.

The word was to advance with as little noise as possible, so as to take the enemy by surprise, if possible, and this was done.

And they succeeded in surprising the British, after a fashion.

They encountered pickets and drove them into the British camp at the bayonet point, and this caused an alarm to be sounded, but the redcoats had no time to get in shape to resist, and the result was that they were routed, and retreated in confusion toward Paulus Hook.

The patriot soldiers pursued the redcoats quite a distance, and then returned to Hackensack highly elated over their victory.

Dick had been in the front ranks, and had done much to urge the patriot soldiers to heroic efforts, and General Clinton complimented him after the affair was over on account of his bravery.

CHAPTER VII.

BACK AGAIN.

The officer wrote a message, which he sealed and delivered into Dick's hands.

"Take that to the commander-in-chief," he said. "He will wish to know of our success at the earliest possible moment."

"So he will," agreed Dick.

He placed the letter in his pocket, mounted Major, and rode away.

"I won't return by the way of Pompton," Dick thought; "it would be considerably out of my way. By cutting straight across the country, the distance to Morristown Heights will be only about twenty miles."

Dick did not think he would be in any danger from redcoats, either.

There were no British troops nearer than Newark, and he would not go closer than eight miles of that point.

Dick was right.

He did not encounter any redcoats, and reached Morristown Heights at about one o'clock.

He reported to the commander-in-chief at once, and delivered the dispatch.

General Washington read the communication, and then turned smilingly to Dick.

"Well, Clinton says they succeeded admirably, Dick, and that he put the enemy to rout without any trouble, and now occupies Hackensack."

"Yes, sir," replied Dick.

"You were in the engagement, of course?" and the commander-in-chief looked inquiringly at Dick.

"Yes, your excellency," the youth replied, quietly. "That is to say, I, in common with the other soldiers of the patriot army, tried to be in the engagement, but the trouble was we couldn't get the redcoats to stand long enough to bring about a real engagement."

"They persisted in keeping continually on the move, eh?" with a smile.

"Yes, your excellency."

The victory of Clinton's troops seemed to please the commander-in-chief, and he was in a rare good humor.

"I should think it was time your friend Bob was returning from Philadelphia, wouldn't you think so?" he asked, after a brief silence.

"I should think so, your excellency; he had but a very little farther to go than myself."

At this instant there came a knock on the door, and when

General Washington called out, "Come in," the door opened and Bob entered.

"Ah, here he is now!" said the commander-in-chief in a tone of satisfaction. "We were just saying it was about time for you to be getting back," he explained.

"I have but just arrived," said Bob; "and here is a letter from General Putnam."

Bob drew a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to the commander-in-chief, and Washington took it, opened and read it, and nodded his head approvingly.

"Very well; very good!" he said, more as though talking to himself.

Then he turned to the youths.

"I thank you both, sincerely and heartily, for the prompt and efficient manner in which you have performed the tasks assigned to you," he said; "at present there is nothing further for you to do."

Then with your permission we will go to our quarters," said Dick.

"Certainly, you are free to go," said the commander-in-chief, and the youths saluted and withdrew from the room and the house.

They made their way to the building that had been confiscated to the use of the "Liberty Boys," and found the youths taking it easy.

"Back again, eh?" exclaimed Mark Morrison.

"Yes, back again," smiled Dick.

"Say, Bob, you went to Philadelphia, didn't you?" asked Sam Sunderland.

Bob nodded.

"Yes," he replied.

"And in going there did you go through Trenton?"

"Yes, I went through Trenton; why?"

"Say, did you see that pretty girl that waved at Dick that day—you remember, when we were leaving Trenton, after we had captured the Hessians; what was her name?—oh, Marshall! That was it! Did you see her?"

Bob shook his head, while the other youths laughed at Sam.

"Say, Sam has fallen in love with the girl sure enough, hasn't he?" said one.

"I should say so!" from another.

"It's a very severe case," from still another.

A number of the youths had something to say, but Sam took it good-naturedly.

He seemed disappointed when Bob shook his head, and said he had not seen the young lady, however.

"That's too bad!" he said; "I was in hopes you had seen her, and talked with her."

"You are not jealous, Sam," said Mark Morrison.

"Of course not," was the calm reply; "I know that after seeing me she would not care for any of you fellows."

The calm manner in which this statement was made was sufficient to set the youths to laughing.

They were a jolly lot of young fellows.

They enjoyed fun as well as any set of youngsters could.

But when it came to real business, they could be as sober and deadly in earnest as any of the men in the patriot army.

Bob called Dick to one side.

"Well, you saw the folks?" he asked, an eager look on his face.

"Yes," replied Dick, and then he went ahead and told Bob all about it, and gave him the message Edith had sent him—the verbal one, wherein she was solicitous for Bob to be careful, and take no unnecessary risks.

Then Dick slipped a letter into Bob's hand.

Edith had given him the letter just as he was leaving the house.

Bob's eyes lighted up, and he seized the letter and went over and sat down where he would not be disturbed.

The youths did not jolly Bob, for they knew the letter was from Dick's sister.

They talked on other subjects, and Bob was left to the perusal of his love-letter undisturbed.

A few days later the patriot troops captured Elizabeth and the British withdrew from Newark.

This left them in possession of but three points in New Jersey—New Brunswick, Amboy and Paulus Hook.

In three weeks' time Washington had rallied an almost entirely disintegrated army, fought two successful battles, captured two thousand prisoners, recovered the State of New Jersey, and restored the confidence of the people in the ability of the patriots to win their liberty and independence.

More, he had made the British generals afraid of him.

A man who could do what he had done with such slender resources was to be feared.

What could he not do if he got an army of goodly proportions gathered together?

Eminent military critics in Europe were amazed.

They took into consideration the force at Washington's command, and compared it with the achievements with the force in question.

Frederick the Great, of Prussia, said that the achievements of Washington and his little band of half-clothed men during the three weeks succeeding Christmas, 1776, were the most brilliant of any recorded on the pages of military history.

Washington was called the "American Fabius."

His wariness far excelled that shown by the gentleman in question.

In addition to his wariness, Washington was remarkable for his courage.

Where would you find more striking examples of audacious courage than those shown in the attack upon the capture of Trenton and Princeton?

There are no recorded events to equal those two feats.

The British were beginning to see that they were going to have a big contract on their hands in subduing the people of America.

Howe and Cornwallis realized it now, if they had not done so before.

They knew it would take another campaign, and possible more, to finish the contest, and they decided to defer operations till warmer weather.

The roads were blockaded with snow, and it would be impossible to move large bodies of troops without entailing great suffering upon the men, and probably considerable loss of life.

So the only sensible thing to do was to wait till milder weather should come.

The larger portion of the British was quartered at New Brunswick, but there were some at Amboy, some at Paulus Hook, and a few in New York City.

Of course it would take a great deal of food for such a large number of men, and the foraging parties made life a burden to the farmers of New Jersey—especially those living within a radius of ten miles of the points named.

These people—or such of them as were patriots, at least—sent messengers to Washington on several occasions, asking if he could not put a stop to the robbing and pillaging by the redcoats, for they did not hesitate to take anything and everything of value that they could lay their hands on. Clothing, jewelry and money were unsafe where they were.

The commander-in-chief of the patriot army consoled with them, and said he sympathized with them—which he did—but that he was sorry to say that he did not see how he could help them.

"If I should send enough of my troops over there to be of benefit to you, and sufficient to check the pillaging of the British, they would have to have something to eat also, and they would not leave you much more than the redcoats will leave you."

"At least they would not steal our clothing, jewelry and money," said the messenger.

"No, they would not do that," was the reply. "Well, I will think the matter over."

Several messengers came, and the patriot soldiers knew of it, and talked of the matter among themselves.

The fact was, that the majority of the troops were not at all eager to go on any such task as the one in question.

It would not be pleasant to chase small bodies of redcoats through the snow.

It was more pleasant where they were.

There was one company which did not look at the matter in this light, however.

This was the company called "The Liberty Boys of '76."

They were youths of an average age of eighteen years, and they longed for action.

They did not like being cooped up day after day and week after week.

They longed to get out and stir around.

One evening after a messenger had been there pouring his tale of woe into Washington's ear, Dick turned to the youths in his company, and said:

"Boys, let's go over New Brunswick way, and see if we can put a stop to the foraging of the redcoats. What do you say?"

"I say yes!" cried Bob, promptly.

He was always eager for anything which promised excitement.

Any change would be a welcome one, he figured, for there was certainly a dearth of excitement where they were.

CHAPTER VIII.

OFF ON A DANGEROUS MISSION.

The other "Liberty Boys" all said the same.

"All right, then," said Dick; "if you are all in favor of the plan, I will go and broach the subject to the commander-in-chief and ask permission to go over there."

"Go ahead," said Bob; "and hurry about it. I want to get away from here as soon as possible, and get to where we can do something."

"Yes, go on," urged Mark Morrison.

So Dick left the building, and made his way to the headquarters of the commander-in-chief.

He secured admittance without trouble, as he was well known to the orderly.

The commander-in-chief greeted Dick pleasantly.

"What can I do for you, Dick?" he asked.

"I have come to ask a favor, your excellency," said Dick.

"To ask a favor, eh, Dick?" with a smile.

"Yes, sir."

General Washington was silent for a few moments, and then he looked up with a smile and said:

"Dick, I have known you six months. During that time I have asked a number of favors at your hands, and you have granted them freely, even gladly; so now I think I am safe in telling you that your request will be granted. I am sure it will be nothing unreasonable."

"I trust you will not so consider it, sir," said Dick.

"What is it that you wish, Dick?"

"This, your excellency: We have understood that there have been a number of messengers here from over in the vicinity of where the British forces are quartered, complaining of the robbing and pillaging by the soldiers, and asking that you send some troops over to put a stop to it. Now, what I wish to ask is that you let me take my company of 'Liberty Boys' and go over there and do what we can to put a stop to this work. Will you grant me the favor?"

The commander-in-chief hesitated.

He looked at the floor for a few moments, as if in deep study.

Presently he looked up, and looked at Dick.

"Dick," he said, "I am going to grant you the favor you ask, but I am going to ask one of you in return."

"Very well; what is it, your excellency?"

"It is this, Dick: That you promise to exercise great care, and keep out of the hands of the British. You must remember that you will be a mere handful of youths, as against an entire army of trained and grizzled veterans. You must not allow yourselves to be surrounded, cut off and captured."

"We will try and not let that happen," smiled Dick. "I give you my promise that we will exercise every possible precaution to keep out of the clutches of the British. My plan will be to lie in wait for small parties, and attack them, and capture such as we can, and thus discourage them and keep them from robbing and pillaging with such a free hand."

"I hope you may succeed in checking them to some extent, Dick. I have no doubt you will be able to do so; but be careful, my boy, be very careful!"

"We will exercise all possible care, sir."

"I have your promise for that, Dick, and I know you will do what you promise to do. When will you start?"

In the morning, I think—or, perhaps it would be better to wait till near noon, so as to get to our destination in the evening."

"Doubtless that would be best."

After some further conversation Dick saluted and took his departure.

When he returned to the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys" his face was beaming.

"It is all right, I know!" cried Bob at once; "you can tell that by the look of Dick's face."

"You are right," said Dick; "the commander-in-chief said we could go, if we would promise to be very careful, and not allow ourselves to be captured by the redcoats."

"Good!" was the cry; "we won't let them capture us, you may be sure—not if we can help ourselves."

The youths were in high spirits.

They were happy in the thought that they were going to go out and do something—or at least try to do something.

"When will we start, Dick?" asked Sam Sunderland.

"To-morrow forenoon. It is about twenty miles to New Brunswick, and by starting at about ten o'clock we will get there in the evening, and will be less liable to be seen by prowling bands of redcoats.

"It is they who ought not to let us see them, Dick," said Bob. "I haven't had a chance to fight for so long that I feel as if I could whip a whole regiment of redcoats all by myself."

"You just feel that way," laughed Mark Morrison.

"Well, isn't that what I said?"

"Yes."

The youths talked and laughed, and chaffed each other, and had a jolly time that evening.

They felt happy.

On the morrow they would get away from this life of inactivity.

It was a pleasing thought for all of them.

When morning came the youths began making preparations for their trip.

They oiled and cleaned their muskets and pistols, and then placed fresh charges in the weapons.

"We don't want any flashes in the pans when we go to shooting," said Sam Sunderland.

"Not a bit of it!" from Mark Morrison.

At ten o'clock they were ready for the start.

They mounted their horses, waved their hands to their fellow soldiers, and rode away.

They were cheered by those left behind, although the majority considered the plan of the youths a very foolish one.

"They'll be risking death or capture every hour they are in the vicinity of New Brunswick, where there are seven or eight thousand of the British," said one.

"Yes, they'll be kept racing around all the time to keep from being killed by the redcoats," from another.

"That's right," from still another; "it'll be one continuous neck-and-neck race with death."

"But what do those 'Liberty Boys' care for that?" remarked another. "That is just what they like. They are

the most dare-devil fellows in the world, and are afraid of nothing. A neck-and-neck race with death is just the kind of a race they like—and if they have half a show, they'll come out winners, too."

"I don't think they'll have half a show, though," from still another.

It may be seen from this that the soldiers in general were of the opinion that the "Liberty Boys" would either be captured or killed by the British.

The youths had no such thoughts, however.

They were full of life and activity.

The thought of danger to themselves was the least disturbing of any thoughts that came to them.

Perhaps the thought that gave them the most concern was that they would not encounter a band of foraging redcoats as quickly as they would wish.

The second most disturbing thought was of where they were to get their dinner.

They rode onward at a good gait, laughing and talking, and enjoying the sense of freedom which came to all of them as soon as they had left the Heights behind.

It was quite cold, but the youths did not mind that.

Their blood circulated rapidly.

They were warm enough.

At noon they stopped at a house in the timber.

They had come about eight miles.

The house was a large, double-log cabin, and a thick column of smoke rolling up out of the big chimney, which was at one end, and built up on the outside of the logs.

Back of the cabin was a clearing of about ten acres.

It was evident the owner of the cabin would be in a position to give them feed for the horses and food for themselves, providing, of course, there had been no foraging parties of British around to see him.

There was no fence in front of the cabin, and the youths rode right up to the door.

Dick leaped to the ground and knocked on the door.

Steps were heard approaching, and then the door was opened a little ways, and the face of a man was seen.

It was a thin, shrewd-looking face, the face of a typical Jersey farmer.

He looked at the youths for a few moments, and opened the door wide, and stood in the doorway.

"Howdy, gents," he said; "I thort et furst ez how ye wuz the redcoats come back ter kerry off ther cabin, seein' es how they hed took mos' ever'thin' else; but I see now ye hain't redcoats."

"No, we are not redcoats," said Dick. "Have they been bothering you?"

"Hev they? Las' night, young feller, they come heer an'

took ever'thin' thar wuz thet could be et, wore, sold er traded off ter other redecoats. Thar wazn't ennythin' lef' but ther cabin, an' ez I wuz sayin', I thort et furst they hed come back ter git thet."

There was a comical grin on the man's face, and the youths could not keep from smiling.

"Can you not furnish us with something to eat, and feed for the horses?" asked Dick; "we will pay you for it."

"Stranger, I hain't got enuff fur myself ter eet," was the reply; "so I kain't accommydate ye, I'm sorry ter say."

The youhts were disappointed.

They were hungry.

They looked at each other in blank dismay.

"What will we do, Dick?" asked Bob; "it begins to look as if we might starve to death before we get back to Morris-town Heights, doesn't it?"

"It does look a little bit that way," with a smile.

"Thar's a ole Tory lives erbout ha'f a mile up ther road in thet direckshun," said the man; "I don' think the red-coats hev bothered him yet, so et's possorable ye kin git what ye want thar."

"Thank you," said Dick. "We will go there and give him a trial, anyway."

"All right; good luck to ye!" and the man shut the door.

Dick remounted, and the youths rode on down the road.

They soon reached the house, and rode up in front of it and stopped.

Dick leaped down and knocked on the door.

A crusty-looking man opened the door and glared at Dick, and then at the youths.

"What d'ye want?" he growled.

"We would like to get food for ourselves and feed for our horses," replied Dick; "we are willing to pay for both."

The man looked suspicious.

He eyed Dick searchingly.

"Air yer right sure ye'll pay fur the stuff ef I let ye hev what ye want?" he asked.

"Quite sure, sir. We will pay in advance if you wish."

"An' then take ther money away frum me afterwards?"

Dick smiled.

"No; we won't take the money away from you afterwards, I promise you that," he said, quietly, and with dignity. "We are not red-coated robbers, sir. We are willing to pay for what we get."

Dick thought the man flinched, and looked slightly disconcerted at his mention of "red-coated robbers."

The man hesitated.

He looked at the youths, pondered a few moments, and then said:

"Well, I guess I kin accommydate ye. Hop down. Ye'll hev ter feed yer horses on ther groun'."

"That is all right; they are used to that," replied Dick.

The man stepped into the cabin, and spoke a few words to some one, and then he reappeared and led the way around to the rear of the cabin.

"Ye kin tie yer horses ter ther trees, an' then we'll bring corn an' fodder fur 'em," he said.

The youths tied the horses, and then they brought feed for them.

"Now, come on," said the man, and led the way toward the house.

It was all the youths could do to get in the house.

It was a large double cabin, however, and they were enabled to make it by crowding.

The woman of the house was already at work cooking, and she kept steadily at it for an hour, the youths taking turns at eating in squads of eight or ten, as that was as many as could get around the table.

When all had eaten, Dick asked the man how much the bill was, and the price named was a very reasonable sum.

The youths paid it without a word, and then went out, and, untying their horses, mounted and rode away with a cheerful "good-by" to the old Tory.

"He was careful not to say anything about the war, did you notice, Dick?" laughed Bob Estabrook, as they rode onward.

"Yes, I noticed it, Bob. He knew we were patriots, and did not wish to get into an argument."

"He was afraid that we would refuse to pay him for our dinners and the feed for the horses, and raid him besides, if we found out that he was a Tory."

"That's right; he did not know we already knew it."

In the timber where the roads had not been much traveled the snow was unbroken, and the going was hard.

The progress of the "Liberty Boys" was as a consequence slow.

They pressed onward at a steady walk, however, and felt sure of being able to reach the vicinity of the scenes of the depredations by the redcoats by nightfall.

They kept on going; they passed a number of houses where the surroundings looked as if there had been raiding parties there.

There was a look of desolation about such a place that was unmistakable.

It was in January, and the days were not very long.

It was sundown almost before the youths knew it, and they began to look around for a place to get supper and feed for the horses.

It grew dark almost before they were aware that it was

time for it, and they began to feel afraid that they were not going to find a place to stop at all.

But they were to do so, sooner than they thought.

Suddenly, as they rounded a bend in the road, they saw a light ahead of them.

The light looked as if it might be made by a pile of burning brush, or something of that kind.

As they came closer, the youths saw that this was what it was.

A lot of brush had been piled in the yard in front of a large cabin at the side of the road, and had been set fire to.

It was blazing up and made a good light, as well as throwing out considerable heat.

Standing around the fire, as the youths could see as they drew closer, were a score of British soldiers.

Others were moving about, and others still were carrying blankets, clothing, etc., out of the house, while the owners of the property were forced to stand near and see themselves robbed.

"It's a band of redcoat foragers!" cried Dick; "charge them, boys, and fire as you advance!"

The "Liberty Boys" responded with a yell of enthusiasm.

Then they rode forward at a gallop.

CHAPTER IX.

A SUCCESSFUL ATTACK.

The youths could not have kept from shouting if they had tried.

They had been cooped up at Morristown Heights just long enough so that they were eager for action.

And here was a chance for action.

Consequently they shouted their delight.

The shout gave the redcoats warning of the approach of danger.

They scattered like chaff in a windstorm.

Some ran around the house, others ran toward some horses which were hitched near by, while others whirled around and seemed undecided what to do.

And at this instant the "Liberty Boys" opened fire with their muskets.

Several of the redcoats fell.

The rest broke and ran for their lives.

The "Liberty Boys" were upon among them in an instant, seemingly, however.

"Surrender!" cried Dick; "surrender, or die!"

Half a dozen of the redcoats paused and elevated their hands, in token that they surrendered.

The others kept on running, however.

The timber was close by, and they ran into it, disappearing from sight quickly.

Those who had started to try to mount their horses had abandoned the idea, and had also taken to the timber afoot.

The "Liberty Boys" had killed a couple of the redcoats, wounded three more and captured a half-dozen besides.

And they had done it so quickly and so easily that they themselves could hardly realize the fact.

The youths dismounted and tied the hands of the six unwounded men.

Then Dick advanced to where the owner of the house stood.

"We have three wounded British soldiers here, sir," he said; "can you furnish them with shelter? It would be barbarous to let them lie out here in the cold and freeze to death."

"So it would, young man; so it would," was the reply; "and I'm not the man to let 'em suffer, even though they wuz robbin' me when they got their wounds. Ye kin bring 'em right into the house, an' I'll make a pallet on the floor whar they'll be reasonably comfort'ble."

Then he gathered up the blankets which had been carried out of the house by the redcoats, and took them back in.

Dick instructed the youths to carry the wounded soldiers into the house, and they did so.

Then he called the man out, and asked if he had a pick and shovel.

"I wish to give the bodies of the two dead men decent burial," he said.

"Yaas, I hev the tools," was the reply, and going to a shed at a little distance from the house, he brought out the pick and shovel.

Dick set some of the boys to digging a hole in the frozen ground, and as soon as they had finished the work, the bodies of the dead soldiers were brought and placed in the hole and covered over.

"There," said Dick; "I am sorry that such things must be, but war is war, and if we never killed any of the enemy they would soon get the better of us. It is impossible to have war without bloodshed."

"Thet's so," said the man; "waal, I'll be glad when et is over with."

"Are you a patriot?" asked Dick.

"Yaas, I'm a patriot," was the reply; "thet's the reason, I guess, thet they wuz cleanin' me out."

"Doubtless," agreed Dick; "though I have known of instances where they robbed their Tory friends, the same as if they were patriots."

"Yaas, I've heerd uv such cases myself, but I guess et don't happen very often."

"No; I think you are right about that."

Then a thought struck Dick.

Might he not get some information regarding the lay of the land in this part of the country?

Might he not learn of some good place to serve as headquarters for the "Liberty Boys" during their presence in the neighborhood?

It was worth trying, anyway.

Then Dick called the man to one side.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Mayhew—Tom Mayhew."

"Well, Mr. Mayhew," said Dick, "I wish to ask you a few questions. I think you can give me some information, and perhaps be of considerable aid to me in the work which we have come down here to perform."

"Ennythin' I kin do will be gladly done, young man."

"Very well; in the first place, these young men you see here are known as 'The Liberty Boys of '76,' and——"

"I've heerd tell uv ye!" the man said, eagerly; "an' so ye're ther 'Liberty Boys,' hey? I'm glad ter see ye!"

"Yes, we are the 'Liberty Boys,'" went on Dick; "and we have come down here for the purpose of trying to put a stop to so much robbing and pillaging by the British soldiers."

"I see; waal, ye'll hev a job on yer han's, fur there's a lot uv ther redcoats. I shouldn't think yer leetle band would be able ter do much."

"We will have to be careful, and swoop down upon small parties as we have done here to-night; but to do that successfully, we will have to have a safe haven of refuge to retreat to. It won't be long, you know, before they will be hunting us."

"Thet's so, an' I know the very place fur ye to go!"

"You do?" exclaimed Dick, eagerly.

"Yaas, et'll be er safe place, I'm sure, and et'll give ye room ter store er hundred—yaas two hundred pris'ners ef ye should be lucky enuff ter capter thet menny."

"How far is the place from here?"

"Less'n er mile."

"So close as that?"

"Yaas, et's on my land. It's er mile closer to ther British at New Brunswick, though."

"That doesn't matter, if it is a good hiding-place."

"Oh, et's a fine hidin'-place. Ye'll say so when ye see et."

"And will you show us the way to this place?"

"Uv course I will; I'm owin' ye consider'ble on account uv yer keepin' them redcoats frum gittin' 'way with my things, an' I'm glad uv a chance ter do a leetle somethin' ter even up matters."

"But what about the horses? Is there any way of hiding them, too?"

"Oh, yes; thar's plenty uv room ter hide the horses."

"And what about feed for the horses?"

"I have plenty here, an' kin take et to the place ter-night. Ef I kep' et heer, et would be took by ther redcoats, ennyhow, so ye might ez well hev et."

"I'll take it, but will pay you for it, Mr. Mayhew; and now, what about food for ourselves? What have you to suggest regarding that?"

"I'll agree ter keep ye in grub," was the prompt reply. "I hain't got nothin' else ter do at this time uv year, an' I'll be glad ter do et."

"I will pay you liberally for your services, and for the food," said Dick. "Well, this is just as it should be. I am very glad that I ran across you."

"I'm glad uv et, too," with a grin; "ef ye hadn't run acrost me when ye did, we'd 'a' be'n cleaned out uv ever'thin' by this time, an' ther redcoats would hev be'n on their way back ter camp rejoicin'."

"How about supper for myself and men to-night? Could you furnish it?"

"Uv course; though et'll take quite a while ter cook enuff fur so menny."

"We are in no hurry, and can take turns at eating, in squads of ten or a dozen."

"All right; come ter ther house, all uv ye. Et'll pack ther shanty purty full, but I guess et'll hold ye all."

"I guess so! we all crowded into a house up the road at dinner time. There will be no need of all entering at once, however; that fire makes it comfortable out of doors, and we need only enter ten or a dozen at a time, as the food is ready."

"All right; suit yourself erbout thet. Come on up ter ther house, ennyhow, an' sech uv ye ez wants ter, kin come in."

Then Dick went and explained matters to the members of his company.

They were well pleased by the news that they could get supper here; also by the news that there was a good place close by, where they could have their headquarters, and not be in much danger of being discovered by the British, either.

Some of the youths brought more brush and threw on the burning pile of dead limbs, and it blazed up afresh.

Dick, Bob, Mark and half a dozen of the youths entered the cabin in company with Mr. Mayhew, and the rest remained outside.

Dick had instructed them to keep a sharp lookout, as a band of redcoats might slip up on them.

Mr. Mayhew's family consisted of four—himself, wife and two daughters, very pretty girls of about fifteen and seventeen years.

The girls had been weeping with fear when the "Liberty Boys" first appeared upon the scene, a few minutes before, but now they had dried their tears; but their eyes were somewhat red.

This could not hide the fact that they were sweet, pretty girls, however, and Dick noticed that the girls eyed him and his friends with considerable interest.

There was considerable of admiration in their looks, too, for they knew what the youths had just done, and they knew the youths must be brave, dashing fellows to attack the British so boldly, and put them to flight.

Mr. Mayhew explained the situation to his wife, and she went to work to cook for the hungry youths.

The girls assisted her, and this made the work lighter, and hastened it forward more rapidly than if one person had had to do it all.

Dick went to where the wounded redcoats lay on the floor, and examined their wounds.

Neither of the three was badly injured.

They would require no particular care.

A little time, and quiet was all they would need, and Nature would do the rest.

While thus engaged, Mr. Mayhew told his wife and daughters that the youths were the "Liberty Boys of '76," and this increased the girls' interest in and admiration of the youths to a marked degree.

They had heard of the "Liberty Boys," and were familiar with many tales of their wonderful doings.

When the first installment of supper was ready, Dick and his eight or ten companions sat down to the table and ate a hearty meal.

Then the women folks went ahead with the cooking, and when the second installment was ready, ten more of the youths came in and ate.

This was repeated until all had eaten, and then they were ready to make the start for the hiding-place Mr. Mayhew had spoken of.

First, however, they would have to get the feed for the horses, as it would save them the trouble of returning for it if they took it along with them now, but just as they were

about to start to the stable to get the corn the sound of horses' hoofs was heard.

There were spots on the road where the snow had been blown off, leaving the frozen ground bare, and the ringing of the shod hoofs of the horses on the hard ground could be plainly heard.

"It must be another band of redcoats!" said Dick. "Back, boys! Let's get away from the house and we will be able to take them by surprise!"

The youths moved back until they were outside the range of the light thrown out by the pile of burning brush, and here they awaited the approach of the body of horsemen.

Presently they rode into the light thrown out by the pile of burning brush, and it was seen that they were British dragoons.

"Ready!" said Dick in a low tone; "wait till they get closer, and at the word from me, fire."

At this instant the commander of the dragoons cried out for them to halt.

"We had better be careful, men," Dick heard him say; "we don't know what that pile of burning brush means. It may conceal a trap of some kind. Wait here until we have investigated."

"We're not going to catch 'em napping, after all," said Bob in a low tone.

"No; we'll have to fire at them where they are," replied Dick.

Then in a loud voice he cried:

"Fire, men, and then charge them!"

The next instant crash! went the muskets, and then "Charge!" rang out Dick's loud, ringing voice, and the youths charged forward with a rush.

A wild, cheering shout went up from the "Liberty Boys."

CHAPTER X.

ROUTING THE DRAGOONS.

This was too much for the nerves of the redcoats.

Several of their men had been wounded by bullets from the muskets.

They were taken almost wholly by surprise.

They were not expecting an attack.

Here they were within three or four miles of British headquarters, and the last thing they would have looked for was to be attacked.

They did not know, of course, how many there were in

the party that had fired upon them, so were afraid to stand their ground.

There might be an entire regiment there, in which case their little party of dragoons would be annihilated.

Consequently as the commander heard Dick's order to charge, he gave the order to retreat, and the dragoons whirled their horses and galloped away back up the road in the direction from which they had come.

The youths fired a volley from their pistols after the fleeing redcoats, and probably the only thing accomplished was to still further accelerate the flight of the dragoons.

"Oh, well," said Dick, as they came to a stop in front of the house, "if we can frighten them to death, it will do as well as to shoot or bayonet them to death. The main idea is to get rid of them in some way."

"That's right," said Bob, with a laugh; "well, I'll wager these fellows won't stop short of New Brunswick."

"And when they get there they will say they were attacked and surrounded by an entire regiment," said Mark Morrison, "and that they only escaped by cutting their way through."

"That is just about what they will tell," agreed Sam Sunderland.

The youths now proceeded to reload their muskets and pistols, and then they went ahead with their preparations for going to their hiding-place.

Mr. Mayhew had some coarse cloth bags, in which corn was placed, and these were loaded onto some of the horses.

The half-dozen uninjured prisoners were placed on as many horses also, and then, telling Mr. Mayhew that they would return with him and bring away the wounded prisoners after they had got settled in their quarters, they set out.

Mr. Mayhew led the way, and it took about half an hour to go the distance of a mile.

The reason of this was because their way led through almost impenetrable thickets and thick timber.

At last they came out in a little circular basin, right on the bank of the Raritan River.

The basin was not more than one hundred yards in diameter, and was surrounded by a ridge of ground fifty or sixty feet in height.

On top of the ridge grew heavy timber and thick underbrush, the same as elsewhere.

"Tie yer hosses," said Mr. Mayhew; "then foller me, an' I will show ye whar ye will be safe, an' ez comf't'ble ez ennythin'."

The youths did so.

Then the man led the way to where the circling ends of the ridge came almost together, at the river bank, and

turning to the left, he led the way behind a thick and large clump of bushes and paused in front of the entrance to what was evidently a large cave.

"Et's er cave," the man said; "et's big an' dry, an' ye'll fin' et comf't'ble, er I'm no jedge. All ye will need 'll be plenty uv brush, so's ter keep er good fire goin'. Thet'll furnish light an' heat er plenty."

"It's just the thing," said Dick.

"So it is," agreed Bob. "It will make a fine place for us to stay, and is close enough to New Brunswick so that we can worry the foraging parties in good shape."

"So it is," said Mark Morrison.

"Two er three uv ye come with me, an' help git some brush an' limbs," said Mr. Mayhew, "an' then I'll go in an' start er fire. Ye'll be able ter see whar ye air goin' then, an' will know whar ye air et."

Several of the youths went with the man, and they soon returned, carrying big loads of brush and dead limbs off trees.

Mr. Mayhew knew the way into the cave, the youths "Oh, yes," replied Dick; "it will be an easy matter for following, and a few minutes later the entire company of "Liberty Boys," with their six prisoners, were in the cave, gathered around a nice big fire.

"This will be jolly," said Bob, enthusiastically. "This will beat being in a house."

"It couldn't be better," said Dick.

Then, taking three horses, Dick, Bob and four more of the "Liberty Boys" went back to the house with Mr. Mayhew, and the three wounded redcoats were brought out and placed on the backs of the horses.

They were not so badly wounded as to make this endanger their lives.

Dick would not have moved them had this been the case.

"D'ye think ye kin find yer way back to ther cave without me goin' along?" Mr. Mayhew asked.

us to do so."

Then they bade Mr. and Mrs. Mayhew and the two girls good-night, and made their way back toward the cave.

Their progress through the timber with the three wounded prisoners was, of course, slow, as they had to be very careful, but they arrived at their destination finally, and got the wounded men off the horses and into the cave.

The youths decided that they had done enough for one night, and made up their minds to remain where they were and take it easy until the next day.

"To-morrow," said Dick, "we will put in the day getting our bearings, and learning the different ways of getting to and from this cave."

"That's a good scheme," said Bob.

This they did.

They spread their blankets on the sand floor of the cave and slept like tops till morning.

They put in the day reconnoitering.

They located as many farm-houses as possible that would be likely to be the objects of robbery and pillage at the hands of the British soldiers.

They might have to retire to their haven of refuge in a hurry some time, and it was best to know the lay of the land thoroughly before starting in to try to do much.

Their presence in the vicinity was already known to the British.

The foraging party would have a tale to tell on returning to New Brunswick, as would also the body of dragoons that had been put to rout.

The result would be that search for the daring band of patriot soldiers would be made.

Hence it would be necessary to exercise great caution.

Dick did not intend to take any more risks than he could possibly help.

He did not wish to fall into the hands of the enemy.

They saw nothing of any British that day, and Dick was glad of it.

He did not wish to have to attack in the daytime.

The redcoats would then see how many—or how few there were of them, more properly speaking—and then a determined search for them would undoubtedly be made.

By keeping the British in ignorance of the number of the patriot soldiers, would be to keep them in a measure intimidated, for they would not know how many men to send against them.

With the coming of darkness, however, the youths left the cave, and, mounting, rode away.

Dick left four of the youths in the cave to guard the prisoners.

They did not know in which direction to go to run across a party of foragers, so had to go at random, and trust to luck.

They maintained absolute silence so far as talking was concerned.

The only noise made was by the hoofs of the horses.

They passed one house and everything was quiet.

There were no British foragers there.

They rode onward, however.

They were confident they would encounter a foraging band of redcoats sooner or later.

They were right.

As they neared a point where they knew a house stood, they saw the glare, such as would be made by a pile of burning brush.

"I think we will find some redecoats here," said Dick. "Let us ride slowly, and slip up as close as possible."

This was done.

They rode very slowly, and the horses' hoofs made scarcely any noise at all.

They approached to within fifty yards of the house without having been discovered.

Much the same scene was being enacted as the one they had come upon at the home of Mr. Mayhew on the preceding night.

Redcoats were standing around the fire, piling on brush, while others were carrying things out of the house.

The owner of the house stood near, helpless.

He could only stand there and silently watch the thieving scoundrels carry his property out of the house and pile it up, ready to be taken away when they should get ready to go.

"The scoundrels!" grated Dick under his breath.

Then he turned and looked at his brave "Liberty Boys."

"All ready!" he said in a low voice.

This was repeated back by one after another of the youths.

They knew the order to charge would be given in another moment.

And it was.

A moment later Dick cried in a loud, ringing voice:

"Charge the robbers! Charge, and fire as you advance!"

And the "Liberty Boys" obeyed.

They urged their horses forward at a gallop.

At the same time they gave vent to a ringing cheer.

In the clear night air it seemed as if coming from the throats of a thousand.

Then the muskets were discharged with a terrible, crashing roar that awoke the night echoes for miles around.

Shrieks, groans, curses, and yells of fright went up from the terrified redecoats.

CHAPTER XI.

WORRYING THE REDCOATS.

The redecoats were taken wholly by surprise.

They were not expecting an attack.

The broke and fled in disorder.

Some of them managed to reach their horses, mount and ride away.

The majority, however, made no attempt to mount, but flew into the timber.

Not all got away.

The youths rode down and captured seven or eight.

In addition there were several wounded men on the ground.

But none had been killed.

The youths secured their prisoners, took charge of the horses that had been abandoned, and, mounting their prisoners on some of the animals, were ready to take their departure.

The man of the house thanked the youths for their timely interference, and Dick told him he was entirely welcome.

"That is what we are down here for," he said; "to put a stop to this robbing and pillaging by the British, and we are going to do it, if such a thing is possible."

When they were out in the road, Dick detailed a dozen of the youths to take the prisoners and captured horses back to the cave.

"We will go on and see if we can run across another gang of foragers," he said. "Remain at the cave till we get back."

The youths detailed to do this work said "All right," and rode away on the back track, and Dick and his followers rode away in the opposite direction.

A couple of hours later they came upon a second gang of redcoats, and attacked and routed them, capturing five of the fellows and several horses.

They kept on and hunted around till midnight, but did not encounter any more bands of foragers, and then they returned to the cave.

"We have done a very good night's work, I think," said Dick.

The others agreed with him in this.

The next night they repeated the success of the night before, and came home with a dozen prisoners and a number of captured horses.

"On to-morrow night," said Dick, "I shall send twenty of you boys to Morristown Heights with the prisoners and captured horses. We are getting crowded in here, and then they eat too much."

On the next evening, after it had grown dark, arrangements were made for the twenty youths to journey to Morristown Heights with the prisoners and the captured horses.

When they were ready they set out.

Dick and the others accompanied them two or three miles on their way as a bodyguard.

It would have been very disconcerting to have had the prisoners rescued by the British, and Dick was one of those cautious fellows who look out for possible contingencies.

When sure that they had gone far enough, and that there would be no danger of encountering any of the British, Dick brought his men to a stop, bade the others good-by, and turned back.

The "Liberty Boys" were fortunate on this night, too.

They succeeded in running across three small parties of foragers and they put them to rout and captured ten prisoners and about twenty horses.

On the next night they were almost as successful, and when they got back to the cave, they found the youths there who had taken the prisoners to Morristown Heights.

They had brought a message from the commander-in-chief, and this was handed to Dick.

It was a letter complimenting them on the good work they were doing, at the same time cautioning him to be very careful.

The praise made Dick feel good, and he would be careful, and constantly on his guard, anyway. It was his nature to be careful.

But, like Washington himself, when it was necessary to be bold and audacious, he could be as bold and audacious as any one could possibly be.

On the next evening, when Mr. Mayhew came with his first load of provisions, his face was grave.

He called Dick aside.

"Ye'll hev ter be mighty keerful, Dick," he said; "thar hez be'n two gangs uv redcoats at my place ter-day. They wuzn't foragin' a-tall, but wuz lookin' fur you an' your band uv 'Liberty Boys.' They axed all kinds uv questions, an' a'most threatened ter string me up ef I didn't tell whar ye wuz."

"I thought they would begin to get waked up pretty soon," said Dick, quietly.

"Oh, they wuz mad, I tell ye! Et will go hard with ye, ef them fellers happen ter run onto ye."

"I think we shall be safe here," said Dick, "so long as we stay in during the daytime, and confine our operations to the nighttime."

"Waal, ye see, they know ye mus' hev er hidin'-place somewhar aroun' heer, an' they'll send out scouts, an' they may stumble onter yer hidin'-place. Then ye would be in a heap uv danger."

"Yes, but I don't believe they will be able to find us."

"Mebby not; but ye hed better keep yer eyes open."

"We shall do that, of course."

That night they went out and met with their usual success, meeting and defeating two foraging bands of redcoats.

They captured six prisoners and a dozen horses.

When the youths got back on the following night they brought a second message from the commander-in-chief.

It complimented Dick and his "Liberty Boys," but cautioned the youth.

"You have been there so long," the letter ran, "and have done so much damage to the British foraging parties that they will be trying to effect your capture. I would suggest that you return to Morristown Heights very soon, for you will be risking death every hour of every day that you remain."

"Doubtless he is right," thought Dick; "in fact, I know he is, for Mayhew tells me there are roving bands of redcoats prowling about in the vicinity every day now. Well, doubtless we are risking death in remaining here longer, but I am determined to stay a few days and strike a few more blows at the redcoats, even though we are forced to run a neck-and-neck race with death in order to make our escape."

Dick talked the matter over with the other boys, however, and they all said the same—that they would like to stay a few days longer and strike a few more blows before returning to Morristown Heights.

It was monotonous there, and they were enjoying themselves here.

The danger but added spice to the whole affair.

Dick did not know it, of course, but at the very time he and the "Liberty Boys" were talking the matter over, the shrewd, gleaming eyes of a scout from the British army at New Brunswick were upon them.

He had been out searching for the hiding-place of the band of patriots who had been doing so much damage to the British during the past two weeks.

He had lost his way, and was wandering through the timber, when he struck the Raritan River, and then, knowing that the British army lay somewhere down the river, he followed the stream until suddenly he came upon the little, circular basin.

The presence of so many horses in the little basin was sufficient for the shrewd wits of the scout.

•He knew he had stumbled upon the hiding-place of the patriot band.

Here were their horses; then they were not far off.

A brief search was all that was needed to enable him to find the entrance to the cave.

He was a bold fellow.

He did not hesitate, but entered the cave with the stealthy tread of the panther.

He saw the youths seated on blankets spread on the floor, and he counted them.

"Only a hundred of them!" he said to himself in sur-

prise; "and the boys down at headquarters have been saying all along that there was a regiment of the fellows, at least! And they're all young fellows, too—ah!" as a sudden thought struck him; "I'll wager this is the gang of patriot youths who call themselves 'The Liberty Boys of '76.' I know it is, and that accounts for the daring work they have been doing. Jove! what a catch they will be, if we can capture them—and there is no reason why we cannot, now that we know where their hiding-place is."

With this reflection the scout slipped back out of the cave, and hastened away through the timber, but keeping along the river.

He arrived at the British headquarters an hour and a half later, and late as it was, he reported to the officer in charge, who happened to be Count Donop.

When Donop learned the hiding-place of the band of patriots that had been doing so much damage had been discovered he was well pleased.

"Good!" he exclaimed; "we will surround the young scoundrels and capture them in the morning."

"Your pardon, sir, but don't you think it would be a good plan to go and capture them to-night?"

The commander shook his head.

"There are only a hundred, you say? Well, there is no necessity for our troubling ourselves to find our way there through the darkness. They will be there all day to-morrow, and we will have plenty of time to surround them, and when they see the force which has been sent against them, they will surrender at once. At night they might try to resist, and we would have to kill a number of them before they would surrender."

Of course the scout had to acquiesce in this, but his own private opinion was that it would have been better to go and capture the youths while they slept.

Time would determine which was the better mode of procedure.

As may be supposed, the announcement that the hiding-place of the patriot band that had been doing so much damage was discovered created great excitement among the British soldiers next morning.

They were eager to be away to capture the "rebels."

An entire regiment, divided up into the ten companies, so as to move with more freedom and greater rapidity, was detailed for the task, and they set out at an early hour.

The plan was to surround the cave where the patriots were in hiding, and approach it from all directions at once.

This plan would, they were sure, result in the easy capture of the "rebel" band.

But would it?

This remained to be seen.

CHAPTER XII

A NARROW ESCAPE.

"I wonder why Mr. Mayhew hasn't come back with his second load of provisions?" remarked Dick Slater next morning, after the farmer had been there with one load of food, and gone home again to get the other.

"I couldn't say, Dick," replied Bob Estabrook; "he is usually back much sooner than this."

"So he is; I don't understand it."

"Probably he had to do some work of some kind before coming back," suggested Mark Morrison.

"Perhaps so, Mark."

The youths had eaten all the food that had been brought at the first load, and presently, becoming somewhat impatient, Dick arose and started toward the entrance of the cave.

At this instant a young and beautiful girl appeared at the entrance.

She ran toward Dick with a little cry, half of joy, half of fear.

"Lizzie, you here!" exclaimed Dick; "what is the matter, and where is your father?"

The girl was Lizzie Mayhew, the daughter of the farmer.

"Oh, Dick!" she cried, stopping in front of the youth, and panting from her exertions, "the British soldiers are all around you! They have discovered where you are, and they are coming to capture you!"

"What! Are you sure?" asked Dick, in some excitement.

The other youths came hurrying to the spot, to hear what the girl had to say.

"Yes, yes! I am sure, Dick! There are a lot of them at our house now, and I heard them tell father that they had discovered your hiding-place, and that they were surrounding you with a thousand men, and that you could not possibly escape. I slipped out of the house the back way, and ran all the way here to warn you."

"You noble girl!" said Dick; "but for you we should surely have been hemmed and captured; but now we will give them something to do before surrendering. It may be by a rather narrow margin, but we will escape them yet."

"Oh, I hope so!" the girl cried.

"But what will you do, Lizzie?" asked Dick, solicitously; "We cannot, will not go away and leave you behind to be

mistreated by the British. They will suspect that you warned us, and they may arrest you as a patriot sympathizer."

"Oh, don't be afraid for me, Dick!" the girl cried; "I will hide so that they can't find me, and will then go back home again after the British soldiers have gone away."

"Are you sure you can hide so they won't find you, Lizzie?"

"Oh, yes; I'm sure of it."

"Very well, then; we will go and try to make our escape. Good-by, Lizzie, and God bless you! You are a brave and noble girl!"

They all hastened out of the cave and the youths bridled and saddled their horses in quick time.

This done, they mounted, and, waving their hands to the brave girl, they rode away through the timber.

They went in the direction of the girl's home.

This was the nearest route to the highway, and the youths knew they could not escape without encountering some of the redcoats, anyway, and they thought they might as well meet those stationed at Mr. Mayhew's house as any.

Just as they reached the edge of the timber at the rear of Mr. Mayhew's the British were starting to advance into the timber.

Dick did not hesitate.

Forward!" he shouted in his clear, ringing voice; "charge the scoundrels, and fire as you advance!"

Then he led the charge, his sword in one hand, a pistol in the other.

The youths came with a rush, and then crash! went the muskets, a number of the redcoats falling from their saddles.

The next moment the two bodies of horsemen came together with a crash.

The "Liberty Boys" had the better of it, however, for they had taken the redcoats by surprise, and almost before the redcoats knew what had happened, the youths had broken through and were riding up the road as fast as their horses could be forced to go.

At the same instant two more bodies of British troopers dashed out of the timber at the right and left, and started in pursuit of the "Liberty Boys."

The body through which the youths had just forced their way got straightened out presently and joined in the chase.

And then began a race that was as exciting as any ever run by any rival parties of men.

In so far as the "Liberty Boys" were concerned, it was a "neck-and-neck race with death," for they were being chased by at least five times their own number, and if they

were overtaken they would most assuredly be either killed or captured.

It would in all probability be the former, for they were youths who were more for fighting than for surrendering, and doubtless a majority of them would have fought to the death.

It was hard to tell at first which had the better horses, as the distance between the two parties remained about the same, but when about a mile had been traversed the horses of the "Liberty Boys" began to draw slowly but surely away from those of their pursuers.

The reason for this was obvious. The "Liberty Boys'" horses had had an all-night rest, while the horses of the British had already been ridden quite a distance through the snow, and they were not so fresh and strong.

"We'll get away from them all right!" said Bob Estabrook. "We are pulling away from them now."

"Yes, I think you are right, Bob," replied Dick, who rode beside Bob.

The redcoats seemed to become cognizant of this fact at about the same time.

They became greatly exercised over the probability that their intended victims would escape.

They fired a volley from their muskets.

The distance was too great, however.

The bullets would not carry up that distance.

They fell and struck the snow some distance behind the "Liberty Boys."

The youths felt safe now.

They knew they were out of range, and they were also aware that their horses were stronger and fresher, and were gradually pulling away from those of their pursuers.

They began to feel happy.

There was reason why they should congratulate themselves.

They had escaped from a trap which, they knew now, had been carefully set for them.

But for Mr. Mayhew's brave daughter they would not have escaped at all.

It had been a very narrow escape as it was.

Onward raced pursuers and pursued.

The redcoats stuck to it with praiseworthy persistency.

They seemed to feel that if they did not improve the present opportunity they would not soon have another.

And they were improving it.

They lashed their poor horses unmercifully to try to force them to gain on those of the "Liberty Boys."

It was of no use.

They could not gain any.

The redcoats kept up the chase for five miles at least.

Then, reluctantly no doubt, they gave up the pursuit.

Realizing that they stood no chance of catching the "Liberty Boys," they stopped and turned back.

Dick at once gave the order to slow up.

"There is no need of running our horses to death now," he said; "they have given up the chase."

The youths at once brought their horses down to a walk, to give them a chance to rest up and get their breath, and they improved the opportunity by congratulating each other on their escape from death or capture.

"It was a close call, Dick," said Sam Sunderland. "If it hadn't been for the girl we would have been captured, sure."

"What are you going to do now, Dick?" asked Bob.

"I guess we had better return to Morristown Heights, Bob, for a while at least. It wouldn't be safe for us to stay in this part of the country longer at the present time. The redcoats are too much worked up."

"That's a fact. Well, we made it lively for them while we were here, anyway!"

The youths kept on, and arrived at Morristown Heights at about one o'clock.

As soon as the commander-in-chief learned that the "Liberty Boys" had returned he sent word for Dick to report to him.

Dick obeyed the summons at once.

General Washington greeted Dick pleasantly, and asked for a detailed story of the doings of the "Liberty Boys" while they were away.

Dick gave it.

The commander-in-chief was greatly pleased.

He praised Dick and the youths in his company, and said they had done splendidly.

"I don't think there will be so much robbing and pillaging done by the British soldiers after this," said the commander-in-chief.

And he was right. At any rate, he did not receive word of many such offenses by the British during the rest of the winter.

THE END.

The next number (11) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "The Liberty Boys' Pluck; or, Undaunted by Odds," by Harry Moore.

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